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By Tom Veitch and Cam Kennedy

script
TOM VEITCH

art
CAM KENNEDY

lettering
TODD KLEIN

cover illustration
Dave Dorman

president and publisher
Mike Richardson

series editors
Bob Cooper, Barbara Kesel, Dan Thorsland, Ryder Windham

collection editor
Randy Stradley

assistant editor
Freddye Lins

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BOOK 2: DEVASTATOR OF WORLDS

In a time of increasing chaos in the Galaxy, divided Imperial forces contend ferociously for control of the Empire.

The Rebel Alliance is quick to take advantage of the upheaval, spreading the cry of rebellion far and wide — and inflicting stinging blows against the feuding Imperials.

At the height of the growing anarchy, a captured Star Destroyer piloted by Luke Skywalker, Lando Calrissian and Wedge Antilles is shot down over the Imperial City.

In an attempt to rescue their fallen comrades, Princess Leia and Han Solo, together with the Wookiee Chewbacca and protocol droid C-3PO, fly the Millennium Falcon into the heart of the conflagration.

But Skywalker, now a Jedi of the highest order, refuses to be saved. Instead he chooses to face a mysterious energy storm that sweeps him, along with R2-D2, toward certain destruction.

Meanwhile, at a secret rebel base, Alliance leader Mon Mothma receives disturbing information: a Dark Side power has emerged from hiding, reunifying the feuding Imperials and gathering the technological might of the Empire for a major assault on the worlds of the Rebellion.

THE *FIFTH MOON OF DA SOOCHA*, AN UNCHARTED WORLD IN THE *CYAX SYSTEM*... WHERE A CAPTURED STAR DESTROYER, RENAMED *EMANCIPATOR*, ORBITS WITH THE FLEET OF THE REBEL ALLIANCE.

ADMIRAL ACKBAR, ABOARD THE CALAMARI FLAGSHIP *DEFIANCE*, HAS JUST RETURNED FROM A RECONNAISSANCE MISSION TO THE INNERMOST QUADRANT OF THE GALAXY...

ALLIANCE LEADER *MON MOTHMA*, COMMUNICATING FROM THE MASSIVE *REBEL STRONGHOLD* ON THE MOON BELOW, HEARS ACKBAR'S REPORT--

SOMETHING VERY *BIG* IS HAPPENING, MON MOTHMA... WE SAW *IMPERIAL SHIPS* FROM *BOTH* SIDES OF THE CIVIL WAR VANISHING INTO THE UNINHABITED REGIONS OF THE *GALACTIC CORE!*

OUR SPIES AND PROBE DROIDS REPORT SIMILAR SIGHTINGS.

THE CIVIL WAR HAS LEFT THE IMPERIAL SYSTEM A *WASTELAND*... THE POPULATIONS ARE IN DESPERATE STRAITS...

WHAT IT PORTENDS, I CAN'T SAY... BUT I *FEAR* FOR THE GALAXY!

ANY NEWS FROM *COMMANDER SKYWALKER*?

YES... NOT *GOOD*, I'M AFRAID...

LUKE'S *STAR DESTROYER* WENT DOWN... IN THE *IMPERIAL CITY* ITSELF. GENERALS *CALRISSIAN* AND *ANTILLES* WERE ABOARD... AMONG OTHERS.

PRINCESS LEIA AND *GENERAL SOLO* LED A MISSION TO FIND AND RESCUE THEM.

AND DID THEY *SUCCEED*?

THEY'RE MAINTAINING RADIO SILENCE... BUT IF THEY *DID* SUCCEED, WE SHOULD KNOW *SOON*!

THEN I'VE GOT *GOOD NEWS* FOR YOU--

--THE *MILLENNIUM FALCON* IS BACK!

ACKBAR AND THE OTHER COMMANDERS OF THE ORBITING REBEL FLEET BOARD SHUTTLECRAFT AND FOLLOW THE FALCON AS IT DESCENDS TOWARD THE STRONGHOLD BELOW--

SOLO TO PINNACLE BASE--I'VE GOT SURVIVORS OF THE STAR DESTROYER LIBERATOR...

...OPEN HANGAR ONE--WE'RE COMING IN!

GUIDED BY CURIOUS CREATURES CALLED IXLLS, THE SHIPS RACE DOWN AMONG THE TREACHEROUS ROCK FORMATIONS OF THE FIFTH MOON...

...WHERE A COMPLEX OF **CAVERNS**, HIDDEN IN THE MOON'S STEEP CANYONS, HAS BEEN ENLARGED AND CONVERTED INTO **OPERATIONS DECKS** AND **FLIGHT HANGARS** BY THE REBELS...

PINNACLE BASE-- THERE MON MOTHMA AND THE AGING GENERALS **MADINE** AND **DODONNA** MEET THE CREW OF THE FALCON --

PRINCESS LEIA! THANK GOODNESS YOU'RE BACK... BUT WHERE'S COMMANDER **SKYWALKER?**

A **TERRIBLE** THING HAPPENED... THE **DARKSIDE** HAS TAKEN LUKE PRISONER-- HE **LET** IT HAPPEN!

AND POOR **ARTOO-DETOO** IS WITH HIM! THEY'LL MAKE **HYDRO-SPANNERS** OUT OF HIM... IF HE **SURVIVES!**

MON MOTHMA CALLS AN EMERGENCY MEETING OF THE ALLIANCE COMMAND STAFF--

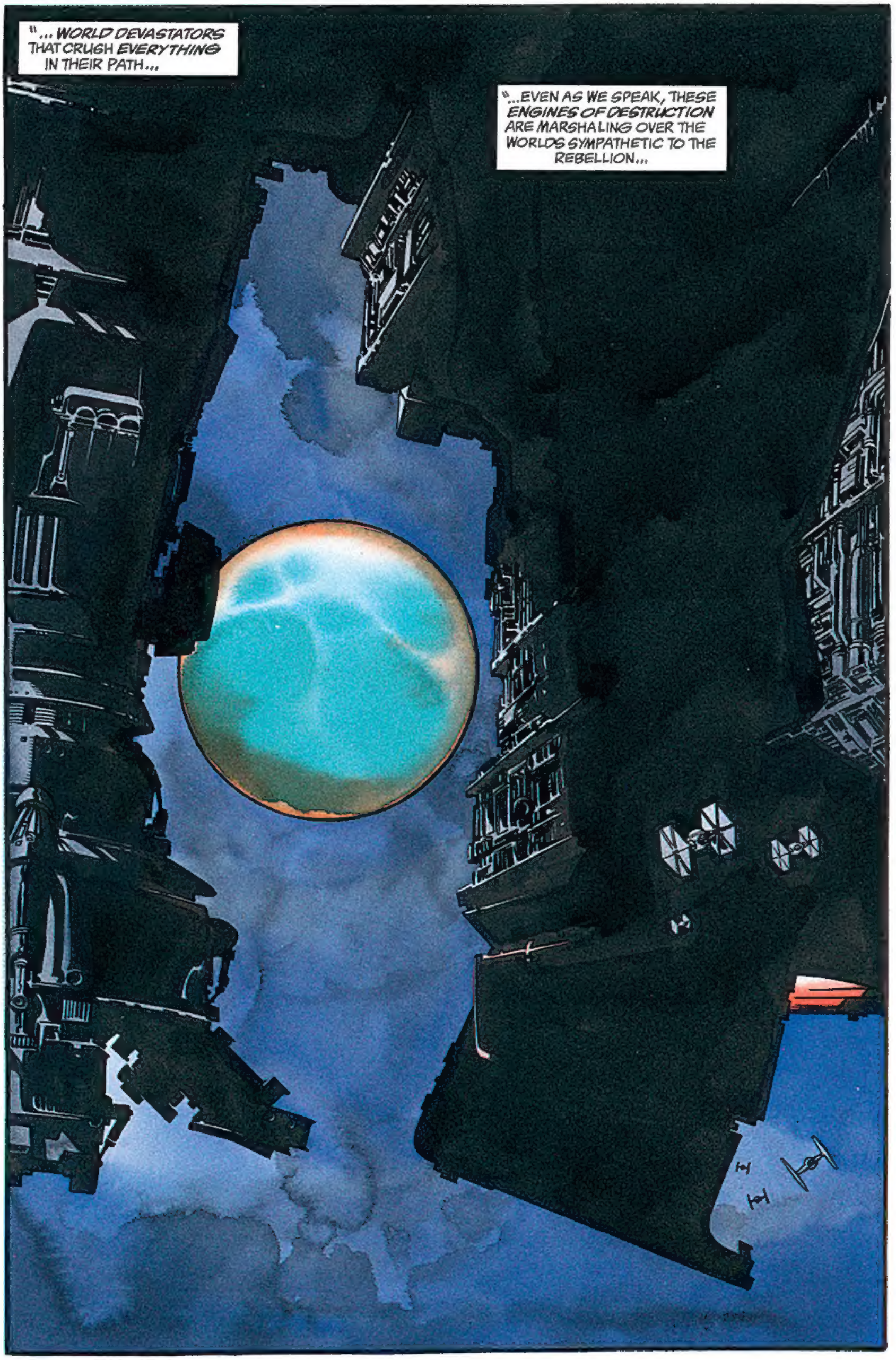
THE **ENERGY STORM** THAT TOOK COMMANDER SKYWALKER--THIS IS **NOT** AN ISOLATED EVENT--

--WE'VE JUST RECEIVED WORD OF A **GREAT WAR FLEET** EMERGING FROM THE VERY **CORE** OF THE GALAXY!

SOMEONE... OR SOMETHING... HAS BEEN BIDING ITS TIME, WHILE THE FEUDING **IMPERIAL FACTIONS** DISTRACTED OUR ATTENTION...

WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE A **DARK SIDE GENIUS** IS AT WORK... CREATING NEW TECHNOLOGIES THAT GO BEYOND **ALL PREVIOUS CONCEPTION...**

OUR SCOUT DROIDS REPORT THE APPEARANCE OF **DIABOLICAL MACHINES...**


"... WORLD DEVASTATORS THAT CRUSH EVERYTHING IN THEIR PATH...
"...EVEN AS WE SPEAK, THESE ENGINES OF DESTRUCTION ARE MARSHALING OVER THE WORLDS SYMPATHETIC TO THE REBELLION...

"THE IMAGES YOU ARE SEEING ARE BEING TRANSMITTED AT THIS VERY MOMENT FROM CALAMARI, ADMIRAL ACKBAR'S HOME PLANET--

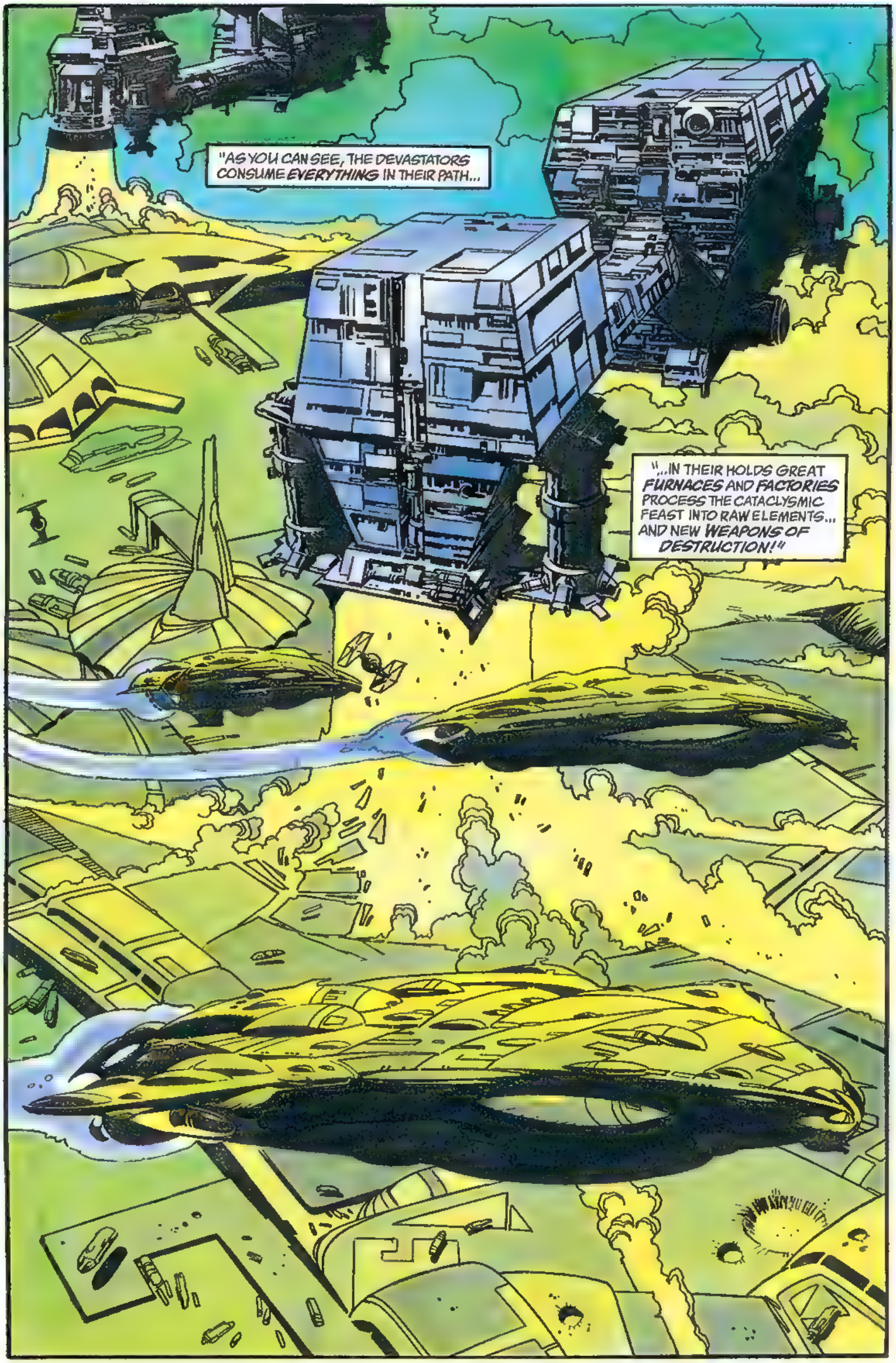
"--THE MON CALAMARI HAVE BEEN A PROUD PART OF THE ALLIANCE SINCE THE BEGINNING-- IT'S NO WONDER THE ENEMY HAS CHOSEN TO TURN ON THEM WITH THESE PLANET SMASHERS... ISN'T THAT TRUE, ADMIRAL ACKBAR?"

"VERY TRUE... MANY YEARS AGO THE MON CALAMARI WERE CONSCRIPTED AS SLAVE LABORERS BY THE EMPEROR... WHEN WE RESISTED, OUR CITIES WERE ATTACKED, TO SET AN EXAMPLE FOR THE REST OF THE GALAXY--

"--BUT THIS EXPERIENCE ONLY HARDENED MY PEOPLE'S WILL TO RESIST--AND TRANSFORMED THEM INTO FORMIDABLE FIGHTERS FOR THE ALLIANCE!

"WHEN THE EMPEROR CREATED THE *DEATH STAR*, CALAMARI WAS AT THE TOP OF THE LIST OF WORLDS SCHEDULED TO BE *ANNIHILATED* BY THAT DREADFUL BATTLE STATION...

"...AND NOW, AT LAST, WHOEVER IS REUNIFYING THE EMPIRE IS CARRYING OUT THE EMPEROR'S DECISION TO DISCIPLINE US... WITH THESE NEW *WORLD DEVASTATORS!*


"AS YOU CAN SEE, THE DEVASTATORS CONSUME EVERYTHING IN THEIR PATH...
"...IN THEIR HOLDS GREAT FURNACES AND FACTORIES PROCESS THE CATACLYSMIC FEAST INTO RAW ELEMENTS... AND NEW WEAPONS OF DESTRUCTION!"

THIS IS THE *GREATEST* SCOURGE THE GALAXY HAS EVER SEEN... FAR MORE LETHAL THAN THE *DEATH STAR!*

UNLESS WE ACT *IMMEDIATELY*, THE CALAMARI WORLD...AND ALL OTHER WORLDS SYMPATHETIC TO THE REBELLION...ARE *DOOMED!*

"THE PINNACLE MOON WE'RE ON ORBITS A HABITABLE WATER WORLD-- *DA SOOCHA*.

"WE MUST DO EVERYTHING WE CAN TO HELP MY PEOPLE REACH THIS PLACE OF SANCTUARY!

"*GREEN* AND *BLUE* SQUADRONS WILL LEAVE AT ONCE TO ESCORT AND DEFEND THE *EVACUATION* OF CALAMARI..."

GENERALS CALRISSIAN AND ANTILLES...ARE YOU PREPARED TO PILOT OUR *OTHER* CAPTURED *STAR DESTROYER* AGAINST THESE *DEVASTATORS?*

I DON'T KNOW... AFTER WHAT WE DID TO THE *LIBERATOR*...

WHAT ABOUT *YOU*, HAN? YOU'RE THE *BEST* STAR PILOT IN THE GALAXY!

YOU AND WEDGE'LL HAVE TO WING IT, LANDO. I'VE GOT MY HANDS *FULL* BRIEFING ALL THE NEW *FIGHTER TEAMS* THAT ARE COMING OVER TO THE ALLIANCE!

THE COUNCIL BREAKS UP... AND HAN GOES TO HIS WIFE, WHO WAS STRANGELY QUIET THROUGHOUT THE MEETING.

THIS ENDLESS **WAR**... IT SEEMS LIKE WE'VE ONLY BEEN ALONE FOR **FIVE MINUTES** SINCE MON MOTHMA MARRIED US...

I REALLY **WANTED** TO GO WITH LANDO... BUT I ACCEPTED THIS OTHER ASSIGNMENT SO WE'D HAVE A CHANCE TO BE **TOGETHER**.

HAN... SOMETHING **AWFUL** IS HAPPENING TO LUKE...

HE'S STILL ALIVE... I CAN **FEEL** IT--

--BUT HE'S GETTING FARTHER AND FARTHER AWAY...

WE **MUST** HELP HIM...

WE NEED SOME TIME TO OURSELVES, LEIA. LUKE DOESN'T **WANT** ANY HELP. HE SAYS HE HAS TO DO IT ALONE, AND I **BELIEVE** HIM...

HAN...

--BESIDES, YOU KNOW ME... **I'M** NOT ABOUT TO CHALLENGE THE JUDGMENT OF A **JEDI**!

WUAWNHNN!

AND WHAT OF LUKE SKYWALKER, JEDI KNIGHT--?

THE ENERGY STORM FUNNELED US INTO SOME KIND OF *HYPERSPACE VEHICLE*, ARTOO...

AT LEAST WE'RE STILL *ALIVE!*

BDEEK?

YEAH, TOO BAD WE CAN'T SEE OUT...

BUT TO THE EYES OF THE *FORCE*, THESE MANDALORIAN WALLS DON'T EVEN *EXIST!*

WE'RE IN AN *IMPERIAL DUNGEON SHIP*... THE KIND THEY USED TO TRANSPORT JEDI KNIGHTS DURING THE CLONE WARS...

...AND IT LOOKS LIKE WE'VE REACHED OUR DESTINATION!

THE PLANET *BYSS*, DEEP IN THE GALACTIC CORE... A WORLD ENTIRELY ENVELOPED IN THE POWER OF THE *DARK SIDE*...

IF THERE'S A DARK CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE, THIS IS IT, ARTOO...

BOOP?

YEAH, HOLD ON, ARTOO--THE SHIP'S STARTING TO DESCEND!

A TURBULENT FALL THROUGH THE PLANET'S ATMOSPHERE, AND THE DUNGEON SHIP DOCKS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF A LUMINOUS CITY...

WE ARE READY TO RECEIVE THE PRISONER!

AN ENERGIZED CAGE IS WAITING--A TRAP TO HOLD A JEDI!

ARE YOU SATISFIED? WE'VE BROUGHT HIM TO YOU ALIVE.

EXCELLENT. HAVE YOUR MEN ESCORT THIS ONE TO THE GREAT HALL.

AS LUKE IS CARRIED THROUGH THE STREETS OF THE STRANGE AND BEAUTIFUL CITY, HE FEELS THE DARK SIDE OF THE FORCE GROWING IN INTENSITY...

LUKE'S JOURNEY ENDS BEFORE THE DOORS OF A GREAT CITADEL. SUDDENLY HE SENSES A MIND REACHING OUT TO HIM... A MIND FULL OF MOCKING LAUGHTER...

THIS IS IT, ARTOO... THIS IS WHERE MY OPPONENT-- WHOEVER HE IS-- IS WAITING!

BWEEEP?

YOU... OUT!

LET'S...GO, ARTOO.

FIGHTING BACK THE WAVE OF OPPRESSION THAT WANTS TO OVERSHADOW HIS MIND, LUKE CALLS UP AN *INTENSITY* OF HIS OWN--

DON'T *THREATEN* ME--I'M HERE BECAUSE I *CHOSE* TO BE HERE!

AMUSING.

KEEP HIM COVERED, BUT DON'T HURT HIM.

LET IT BE HIS "FREE CHOICE," IF THAT'S WHAT HE WANTS TO BELIEVE...

...BUT HE'S WALKING TO HIS DOOM!

AS THE ROBED FIGURES LAUGH QUIETLY AMONG THEMSELVES...

...LUKE STRIDES BOLDLY INTO THE DARK CITADEL.

WITH A JEDI'S FLAWLESS INTUITION, HE MARCHES DIRECTLY TO THE *THRONE ROOM*--

EXCELLENT! *EXCELLENT!*

YOU HAVE COME TO ME OF YOUR OWN FREE WILL!

YOU!

SOMEHOW, I KNEW... BUT I SAW YOU DIE!

YES, YOU KNEW, DIDN'T YOU ...YOU'VE GROWN VERY STRONG IN THE FORCE SINCE LAST WE MET...

BUT THEN, SO HAVE I!

IT WAS NOT THE FIRST TIME I DIED... NOR WILL IT BE THE LAST!

SUCH ARE THE MYSTERIES OF THE DARK SIDE OF THE FORCE!

YOU SEE, MY FRIEND, FLESH DOES NOT EASILY SUPPORT THIS GREAT POWER!

FOR MANY YEARS I HAVE BEEN UNDER A DIRE NECESSITY!

MY BODY HAS DECAYED AGAIN AND AGAIN... AND EACH TIME I HAVE NEEDED TO TAKE ANOTHER...

A HUMBLE CLONE OF THE MAN I ONCE WAS...

CLONES!

THEN IT'S TRUE!

YES, YOUNG SKYWALKER.

THE DYING IS PAINFUL...THE TRANSITION IS NOT AN ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE.

BUT THE SUFFERING IS A SMALL PRICE TO PAY... FOR ETERNAL LIFE!

AFTER ALL... I LIVE PRIMARILY AS ENERGY... FORMLESSNESS...

...AND POWER!

AND NOW, MY YOUNG APPRENTICE...

YOUR FATHER IS DEAD.

HAVE YOU COME TO JOIN ME?

WILL YOU TAKE THE PLACE THAT RIGHTFULLY BELONGS TO YOU... AT MY SIDE?

SENSING LUKE'S INDECISION, THE EMPEROR PRESSES THE YOUNG JEDI... WITH THE VERY TEMPTATION THAT ENSNARED HIS FATHER--

LOOK! MY WORLD DEVASTATORS-- YOURS TO COMMAND!

THE REBELS HAD THEIR CHANCE ... I GAVE THEM *YEARS* TO RECLAIM THE GALAXY! BUT WITHOUT THE *JEDI KNIGHTS*, THEY FAILED MISERABLY!

AND NOW I HAVE OUTFLANKED THEM! WORKING IN SECRET I HAVE CONSTRUCTED WEAPONS SUCH AS WERE NEVER SEEN...

BOOP?

IT IS YOUR *DESTINY*, MY FRIEND... TO SUCCEED YOUR *FATHER*...

...TO WIELD MY *DISCIPLINE* OVER THE WORLDS THAT HAVE *BETRAYED* ME!

IT IS A MOMENT OF TERRIBLE CONFLICT FOR LUKE SKYWALKER... THE EMPEROR'S ARGUMENTS HAVE NOT TOUCHED HIM...

...BUT CAN HE USE THE FORCE TO DEFEND THE FREEDOM OF BILLIONS...BY *SLAYING* THE OLD MAN?

IS IT SO *DIFFICULT* TO DECIDE, MY SON?

SURELY YOU KNOW THAT IF YOU STRIKE ME DOWN IN ANGER, I WILL LIVE AGAIN!

...PERHAPS I WILL EVEN LIVE AS *YOU*!

THE EMPEROR IS A MASTER STRATEGIST... HE HAS FORESEEN THIS MOMENT... NOW, UNEXPECTEDLY, HE OFFERS LUKE THE *ONLY*-- THE *INEVITABLE*-- SOLUTION TO HIS DILEMMA.

I SEE YOU HAVE GROWN WISE IN THE WAYS OF THE FORCE... YOU HAVE ACHIEVED *CONTROL*.

YOU ARE NO LONGER THE IMPULSIVE YOUTH, AT WAR WITH YOUR OWN ANGER...

BUT YOU CAN STILL CONQUER ME...BY LEARNING THE *SECRETS OF THE DARK SIDE*. WE BOTH KNOW THERE IS NO OTHER WAY FOR YOU.

THE EMPEROR'S WORDS BLAZE LIKE LIGHTNING ACROSS LUKE'S MIND...THE DARK SIDE HAS SPOKEN...AND FOR ONCE IT SPEAKS *TRUTH*.

A MOMENT OF GREATEST PERIL HAS ARRIVED...BUT IT IS THE MOMENT FOR WHICH LUKE WAS BORN...

HE MUST CHALLENGE THE DARK SIDE FROM *WITHIN*... HE MUST PENETRATE THE POWER OF THE DARK SIDE, AND HE MUST LEARN ITS *SECRETS*...

THERE IS NO OTHER WAY.
YES.
MY FATHER'S DESTINY IS MY OWN.
VERY GOOD! IT IS DONE!
MY FRIEND, LET US CELEBRATE OUR CONQUEST OF A GALAXY!
WEEEE BDEEP?

LEIA?

LEIA...WHAT'S GOING ON?...YOU'VE BEEN HOLED UP HERE FOR DAYS!

C'MON OUT AND SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING!

IT'S GREAT! THE GALAXY IS PULLING TOGETHER AGAINST THE EMPIRE!

ANOTHER DETACHMENT OF FIGHTERS JUST ARRIVED FROM NORVAL II!

HAN...I SHOULDN'T HAVE LISTENED TO YOU.

I SHOULDN'T HAVE LISTENED TO LUKE.

I HEAR TERRIBLE LAUGHTER.

SOMETHING AWFUL HAS JUST HAPPENED, HAN...

WE'VE LOST HIM.

HEY, OLD LUKE'S GOT MORE TRICKS UP HIS SLEEVE THAN--

HAN, DON'T BE A FOOL!

LUKE'S IN SERIOUS TROUBLE, AND I HAVE TO HELP HIM... DON'T YOU SEE? HE NEEDS ME!

UH...YEAH. I SEE.

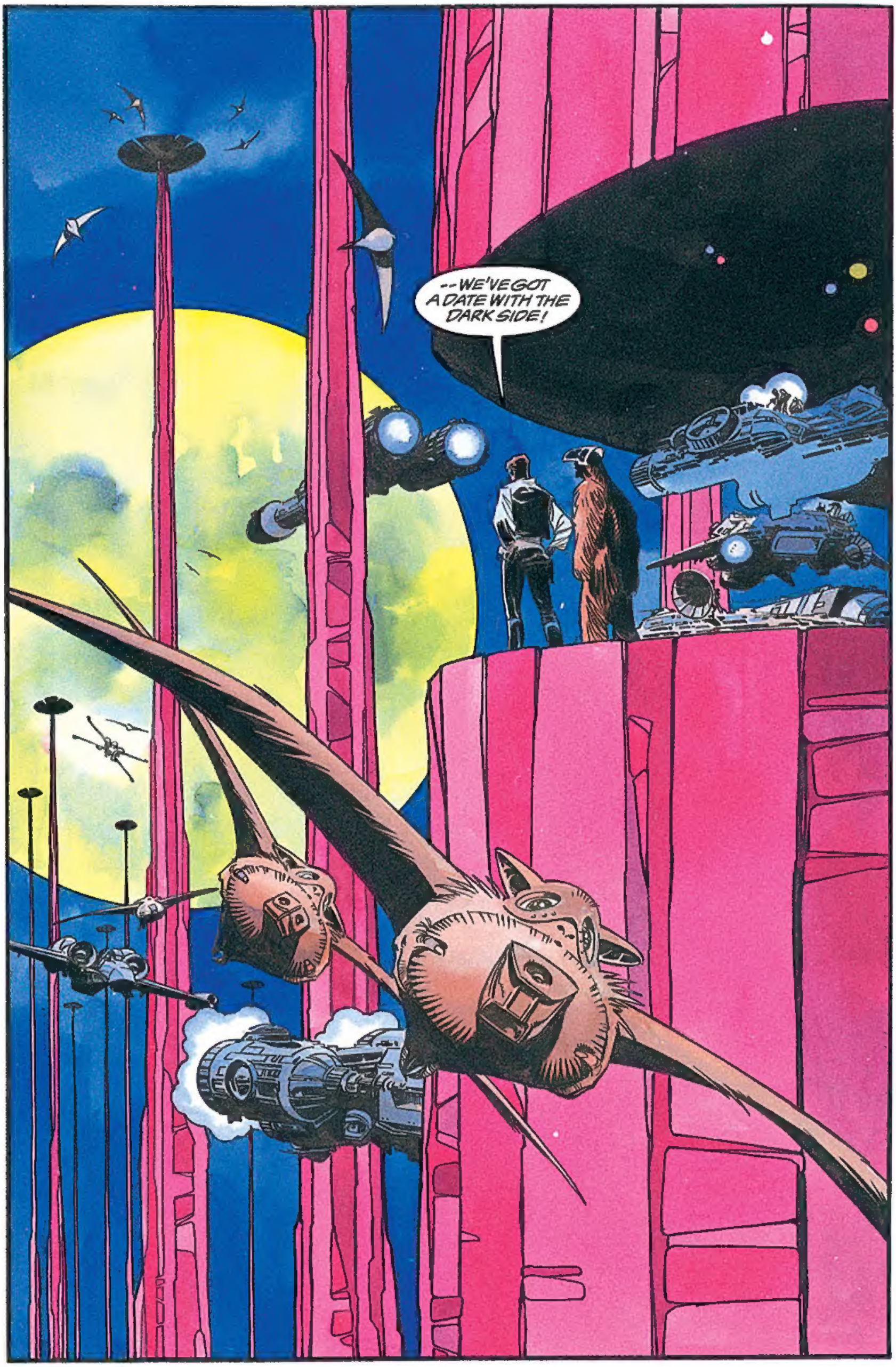
LEIA... I'VE GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS.

OH, HAN...

THEY TOLD ME MARRIAGE TO A JEDI PRINCESS WASN'T GOING TO BE *EASY*...

THEY WERE *RIGHT*.

CHEWIE...WHEN YOU FINISH FIXIN' THE FLUX STABILIZER, FUEL UP THE FALCON...


--WE'VE GOT A DATE WITH THE DARK SIDE!

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